

Carmarthenshire County Council Response to the Senedd Public Account Committee Inquiry

Barriers to the successful implementation of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Thank you for inviting Carmarthenshire County Council's views on the barriers to the successful implementation of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. After five years it's important that the public sector takes stock and considers the Future Generations Commissioner's and Auditor General's reports published in May this year on the progress being made. We welcome this opportunity to submit our views.

1 Awareness and understanding of the Act and its implications

1.1 There is good guidance available on the Act with a number of resources available to promote awareness and understanding, including the Essentials guide, Megan video and website content. There are several guides available for public bodies which are well written and accessible. In Carmarthenshire, we have supplemented the guidance and developed our own ways of raising awareness and understanding of the Act by:

- conducting training with elected members on the Act and have embedding the Act into our Strategic and Service planning processes. We are also fusing the Act's requirements into our new Integrated Impact Assessments which will be introduced in the next few months.
- starting a series of workshops on the 5 Ways of working especially for the corporate functions that require change as a result of the by the Act.
- integrating the Act into our corporate planning and business planning framework and embedded our Well-being Objectives into those requirements.
- introduced promotional material such as a simple ABC one side guide to the Act, credit card size guidance and other promotional material.
- Consulting on the Council's Well-being Objectives as part of the annual budget consultation with the public.

1.2 As a Council we feel that internally, from an officer and councillor perspective, there is good awareness and understanding of the principles of the Act. Many of the elements are now being implemented and embedded into core practice in terms of our planning. Progress is also being made on embedding the five ways of working into all that we do and we will be introducing our new integrated impact assessment over coming months which incorporates the Well-being of Future Generations duties alongside other statutory duties including equalities, Welsh language and pending socio-economic duty.

1.3 This level of awareness and understanding is also reflected in our work and dealing with other public and third sector partners. There is also some general understanding within the private sector despite the Act not directly relating to their work.

1.4 However, we would question how well understood the Act is amongst the wider public and what level of awareness there is of the requirements. This may be an area for development at a national level in future. At a local level we have tried to address this

by introducing a mini-Executive Board where 10 primary school age children have been identified to shadow the Executive Board members and they then support communication of key messages from the Council to Carmarthenshire residents. We had started to make good progress on this up until the lockdown and will be looking to re-instate this as soon as practicably possible.

- 1.5 In addition, in order to aid awareness and understanding it would be beneficial if the Auditor General's *'Positive indicators of the five ways of working'* and the *Future Generations Commissioner's 'Framework for service design via the 5 ways of working'* could be the same. Having two similar but different sets of guidance can be difficult when aiming for consistent implementation.

2 The resources available to public bodies to implement the Act and how effectively they have been deployed

- 2.1 Implementation of the Act and its duties has been undertaken through existing corporate arrangements within the Council and due to budgetary constraints, no additional resource has been committed. This has meant that progress in fully embedding the Act requirements has been slower than desired and we are still working towards ensuring the five ways of working drive all of our activity as a Council.
- 2.2 Given the scale and ambition of the Act additional resources from Welsh Government would be required to take this work forward at a faster pace.
- 2.3 To a degree, the introduction of the Local Government Bill next year will aid implementation as it will remove some of the statutory duties we are required to fulfil through the Local Government Measure and aid full transition to the Well-being of Future Generations Act requirements.
- 2.4 On a more general note, embedding the sustainable development principle when Councils and other public bodies are only offered short term funding can inhibit the long-term planning that is key to applying the principle. Our ambitions are curtailed by restrictions on funding. This is also true of grant funding which is awarded with strict criteria in terms of implementation. This can sometimes mean that services are developed and implemented to suit the grant criteria rather than what is actually needed in the community. We aim to ensure we embed the five ways of working in all that we do but this can be challenging when facing such short-term and fixed funding allocations.
- 2.5 The Council also has a lead role to play in addressing longer-term societal issues such as climate change, poverty, inequalities and economic growth. Without additional resource to support this response it is challenging to make the necessary progress. The Public Services Board (PSB) also has a key role to play in responding to these future challenges but again without additional resources the potential of the PSB will not be fulfilled.

3 Support provided to public bodies by the Future Generations Commissioner

- 3.1 There is extensive material available on the Future Generations Commissioner's website. Although always well considered and appropriate it can be very challenging to be able to take account of all of the different sets of guidance and documents available and there may need to be some consideration of how this information is disseminated. For

example, the Future Generations Report published in May contains a wealth of information, guidance and recommendations, but it has been particularly challenging to be able to set aside time to digest the whole report given the sheer size of it.

- 3.2 As we are now far better versed in using online/virtual meetings, maybe creating a programme of on-going short, sharp webinars would be a better way of communicating the valuable content that is prepared by the Commissioner's office. This could then be made available to officers and councillors to digest in a more convenient way.
- 3.3 Public bodies must set their own Well-being Objectives to maximise their contribution to the National Goals. Public bodies then set out plans to achieve their objectives and report against them. For us locally, our focus is on delivering against our locally agreed outcomes therefore its is challenging when increasingly the Future Generations Commissioner's Office asking us to demonstrate how we are doing against the National goals.

4 The leadership role of Welsh Government

- 4.1 The introduction of the new Local Government and Elections Bill will consolidate the performance requirements and Well-being of Future Generations expectations upon Councils. This will be beneficial and is timely.
- 4.2 There could be greater integration of the Act requirements across different Welsh Government departments and more strategic leadership in terms of ensuring different policy areas take account of each other's needs.
- 4.3 As noted earlier, implementation of the five ways of working when considering budget allocations, especially specific grants could be improved and adoption of the definitions of preventative spend would help public bodies.

5 Any barriers to the successful implementation of the Act (e.g. Brexit, COVID, etc.).

- 5.1 Many of our plans for this year have been 'blindsided' by the Covid-19 Pandemic and many of our usual reporting mechanisms may look and feel a little different this year. However, some of the lessons learnt by the experience and some of the new ways of working will be beneficial. We have conducted an internal review to ensure we capture the lessons we learnt and prepared a Community Impact Assessment. These will be used as part of our COVID-19 recovery plans.
- 5.2 We have integrated our Well-being Objectives into our Corporate Strategy and this has been a considerable step to mainstreaming the Act within the Council. In our view it is important that public bodies integrate their Well-being Objectives, Corporate Strategy, performance measures and budget setting as required by the Act.
- 5.3 One of the key barriers for us locally, is fully understanding and avoiding duplication and contradiction when responding to different legislative requirements which sit alongside the Act, such as the Social Services and Well-being Act, Environment Act and Local Government Measure 2009 and others. This is an element that Welsh Government needs to give further thought to as at times the integration between such requirements is lacking and we have to make sense of the different requirements at a local level, when we have less resources than Welsh Government to do so.

- 5.4 The reporting requirements of different legislation can also hinder progress on Well-being Objectives as different departments focus on their legal commitments and requirements of reporting that can conflict with collaborative and integrated well-being.
- 5.5 It is important not to turn the good will for the Act into a compliance exercise but to continue to encourage the spirit of the Act.

6 How to ensure the Act is implemented successfully in the future

- 6.1 This is a long journey and it will take time to fully embed the Act across all that we do as a Council. This is a significant cultural change in the way that public bodies operate, and although we are making good progress there is still some way to go.
- 6.2 Clear direction and commitment from Welsh Government in the continuation of embedding the Act is required. Whilst being fully appreciative of the need for challenge and scrutiny of how things are going, in the first few years since the Act was introduced there have been several inquiries or calls for evidence into the way in which organisations are embedding the Act. Greater collaboration on these types of enquiries would be beneficial.
- 6.3 Additional resources to support raising awareness of the Act amongst the public would be beneficial going forward. This would raise the level of expectation and aid further embedding of the Act in all that we do.